

MAGONIA ETH Bulletin

Editor: JOHN HARNEY

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EDITORIAL

Many ufologists obviously misunderstand our criticisms of the ETH and our espousal of the PSH. Most UFO reports can be explained and the PSH is often useful in showing how such reports can be coloured by popular beliefs about UFOs, and science fiction stories and films about extraterrestrial beings.

By examining some of the most puzzling reports we hope to tease out any facts which cannot be explained with reference to the psychology of the witnesses or the influences of popular culture. Thus, if the ETH is valid, our efforts will serve only to strengthen the evidence in favour of it.

WALTON AGAIN

How was it done?

In issue No. 2 of this *Bulletin* (April 1998) I discussed the Travis Walton UFO abduction story, with particular reference to the difficulties encountered in explaining it as a hoax. I also discussed possible motives. These motives, real or conjectural, have been discussed at great length by UFO believers and sceptics alike.

I raised the matter again in issue No. 3 (May 1998), hoping that someone would be able to give a coherent and convincing reconstruction of the Walton affair. Since then I have read all the descriptions and comments on the case that I could find in the literature available to me. Most of them dwell on possible motives and suspicious words and behaviour by Walton, Rogers and others which indicate a hoax as the likely explanation.

However, as I pointed out in the May 1998 issue, what I am trying to discover are not the reasons for perpetrating a hoax, but the means by which it was carried out.

Some of those who favour the hoax explanation believe that it was organised by the Walton family, and others believe that Mike Rogers was in on it also and that it was largely instigated by him.

Town Marshal Santon Flake asserted:

I think the whole thing is a hoax, set up by Travis and his brother Duane, to make some money. I believe the other kids did see something, but they were hoaxed, too. What they saw was an inflated rubber raft, or something like that, all lit up and hung in the trees to look like a UFO. Travis set them up, telling them stories about UFOs; and when he had them ready, it happened. (1)

Does the hoax theory make sense?

So, according to this scenario, Travis and his brother Duane, being UFO buffs (according to some investigators), decided to fake a UFO. On 5 November 1975, while Travis was taking every opportunity to get his workmates wound up by telling them UFO horror stories, Duane was busy rigging up a life raft, or some similar object with a light inside it, in the trees near where the truck would have to pass on its way out of the forest.

Just think about it. This version depends on the gang of loggers being credulous, timid and very short-sighted. If they were really like that wouldn't they be more likely to be at home with their mothers, helping with the housework and the shopping (when their nerves weren't too bad), rather than wielding chainsaws in the forest?

No, if it was a hoax then Rogers and the rest of the gang must have been in on it. This brings

us to the difficulty that I mentioned in the April issue. This is the problem of the brilliant acting and well-rehearsed story required to convince police officers that something inexplicable really happened. If the loggers' acting was not brilliant, then this raises the possibility that the police officers they contacted were also in on the hoax. The motive for this would presumably be the overtime payments they could expect as a result of pretending to search for Walton. This would also conveniently explain the eventual disappearance of police files on the case. (2)

Police investigations

It is said that the police suspected that the men had murdered Walton and then invented the flying saucer story in a pathetic attempt to cover up the crime. But I have not managed to find any account of the police having the mens' clothing, truck and chainsaws subjected to forensic testing for bloodstains. Yet, when Sheriff Gillespie got a tip-off at 2:30 a.m. on the morning of 11 November that someone had called Walton's brother-in-law, Grant Neff, from a phone booth at Heber filling station, he sent a couple of deputies there to collect fingerprints.

Jerome Clark writes: 'There were no prints at all on the phone in the third booth . . . The other two had prints, but so far as Ellison and Romo could determine in the cold and dark, none was Walton's.' (3) Just picture the scene. The men dust the phones to show up the prints. One holds the torch while the other squints at the phone. Finally he shakes his head. 'No, none of them are Walton's; I'd recognise his prints anywhere.' Actually the men would have transferred the prints to sticky tape and they would later be compared, by a fingerprint expert, with a set of Walton's prints. Walton claims to have phoned Neff at 12:05 a.m. and the deputies could not have arrived at the phone booths until about three hours later. Thus there was plenty of time for other people to have used the phones and obscured Walton's prints. As negative evidence supporting the hoax theory, this one is a non-starter.

That bruise

Another non-starter is the nonsense about the bruise. Rogers and his gang alleged that Walton was hurled backwards, landing heavily on his right shoulder. One gets the impression that some people seem to think that a bruise is like a tattoo; once you get one it is there for keeps. Walton asserted that, as a healthy young man, he did not get any noticeable bruises. This is hard to believe, but, according to a medical encyclopedia, (4) 'If a bruise does not fade after about one week . . . a doctor should be consulted.' Walton's medical examination, arranged by APRO, took place six days after the alleged incident, thus giving time for the bruise (if he ever had one) to have faded away.

A normal working day?

One possible approach to the puzzle is to try to list the most relevant undisputed facts of the case. This is rather difficult. Obviously, we should start with what Rogers and his gang were doing during the morning and afternoon of 5 November.

It is easy to assume that they were simply engaged in their normal work. This would make sense if the incident was not a hoax. In fact, there is some dispute as to what happened that day, as Walton himself acknowledges. In his first book he 'was trying to show readers what a typical workday was like', and in his second book he attempts to set the record straight by saying that he had been asleep when the truck arrived at the work site, and that he then spent 'less than two hours' resting. After that he worked normally for the rest of the day.

Here he is trying to counter an allegation made by Steve Pierce who, when approached by a person offering him a large sum of money - said to be \$10,000 - to deny the reality of the UFO sighting, denied that it was a hoax but said that Walton had 'not worked at all that day, was gone most of the day, and that Mike Rogers had disappeared for hours that morning'. (5) Walton insists that this is untrue, that no one left the work site, and he quotes from statements by Mike Rogers and John Goulette supporting his version.

The UFO

Thus we have at least one of the gang saying that it was not a normal working day. Next we come to the UFO sighting itself. Apparently, all seven men agree on the essential details; at least none has publicly disagreed with the published descriptions of the alleged encounter, although different accounts disagree about the details. Walton's account even appears to contradict itself. He tells us that 'a mere ninety feet above the ground, a strange, golden disc hovered silently' and, in the next paragraph that 'the metallic craft hung motionless, fifteen feet above a tangled pile of logging slash'. (6) That the slash pile was 75 feet high seems unlikely.

The main problem here is that we have only Walton's detailed account to go on. What we need are detailed accounts written independently by the other six men. However, if we believe that it was a hoax, then they didn't see anything unusual. This brings us to the first undisputed fact and one of the major difficulties in explaining the affair as a hoax.

Brilliant acting?

At about 7:35 that evening, Ken Peterson phoned Deputy Sheriff Chuck Ellison and told him that one of the crew was missing. He drove to meet them in Heber, where he was joined within an hour by Sheriff Martin Gillespie and Undersheriff Ken Coplan. So far as I know, no one has attempted to deny that the men were in a highly emotional state about the alleged flying saucer and the mysterious disappearance of Walton. It is also agreed that they were closely questioned without their story falling apart. And, as I and others have said before, it is generally agreed that if the men were acting then it was very good acting.

For some critics of the story this is the sticking point. They can't get over it so they backtrack and say that perhaps something very strange did happen, but it wasn't a flying saucer. Thus we get the hand-waving theories about some rare plasma phenomenon that terrifies the crew and zaps Walton with an electrical discharge, causing him to wander around in a trance until he returns more or less to normal five days later, with an electrically induced fantasy about being abducted by aliens. Phew! If you believe that, you'll believe anything.

Conclusions

It's easy to discuss the Walton case as a hoax by attributing various motives to the people involved, but this does not help us to understand it. It is not clear, for example, who were the hoaxers and who were hoaxed. There is also considerable disagreement as to the interpretation of the behaviour of Walton's brother Duane and his mother Mary Walton Kellett after they had been told of Walton's disappearance. Did they already know what was going on or did it come as a surprise? It is easy to twist the evidence to support one's preferred explanation.

What we need, if we are to dismiss the case as a hoax, is a coherent account describing how it was organised and executed and who were involved in the plot. Any ideas, anyone? And I don't want to hear any more about motives.

References

1. Barry, Bill. 'Kidnapped', in Rogo, D. Scott (ed.), *UFO Abductions: True Cases of Alien Kidnappings*, Signet Books, New York, 1980, 35
2. Walton, Travis. *Fire in the Sky: The Walton Experience*, Marlowe & Company, New York, 1997, 276
3. Clark, Jerome. *The UFO Encyclopedia 2nd Edition: The Phenomenon from the Beginning*, Omnigraphics, Detroit, 1998, 986 (A review of this monumental work is being prepared for publication in *Magonia*.)
4. Smith, Tony (ed.). *The British Medical Association Complete Family Health Encyclopedia*, Dorling Kindersley, London, 1996
5. Walton, op. cit., 131-132
6. Ibid., 36

LETTERS

Thanks for continuing to send *ETH Bulletin*. Always of great interest. The current issue brought large smiles because of its discussion of both migraine and Levelland, two issues debated by me in books that *Magonia* ridiculed. The first point - migraine - is assessed alongside epilepsy and blood sugar changes that may well precipitate the OZ factor at the onset of close encounters. I think it is very relevant as I have found a high incidence of migraine claims amongst repeater witnesses. See my book *Mind Monsters* (Aquarian, 1990) for this discussion. A number of readers felt that this book was an interesting set of theoretical ideas, linking as it does physics with psychology. Most UFO magazines never even reviewed it and it only sold 2500 copies - all in the UK. Indeed, I bought all the left-over stock and still have about 100 copies. I still get people telling me it is one of my best.

As for Levelland, there are many significant features to this case. To me by far the most interesting is not mentioned at all in your survey - possibly because it's in another *Magonia* rebuked book (*The Complete Book of UFOs*, Piatkus, 1997; earlier editions also carry the story).

Here, what I found most intriguing was the reports not just at Levelland but in the atomic test bunkers that same night. Especially when compared with the Derek Murray case, reported direct to me

by the witness. This guy is an excellent witness (and since the book I have had an independent back-up to his story - so it holds together). They were with the RAF at Maralinga - site of the UK atomic tests - and witnessed a UFO directly over the bomb blast site. This appears to have occurred virtually simultaneously with the USA events (allowing for time zones). Thus we have on that one night - the very night the first life-form from Earth is launched into space (Laika) - the apparent demonstration of technological superiority displayed at Levelland and - in two completely independent cases - UFOs directly over the sites of (a) the location where the first ever atomic weapon was detonated 12 years earlier and (b) the location where the most recent blast took place only days before - on the other side of the world in Australia.

To me this sequence of events is perhaps the most persuasive there is that something 'alien' might be behind the UFO mystery. The timing and the sequence of events is so intriguing it does seem to suggest a correlation and an implicit message or warning.

So - in my view - Levelland is all the more interesting for these rather obscure connections that you don't seem to have known about.

Jenny Randles, Buxton, Derbyshire

Re multiple witnesses, I would rate the Gill case in Papua on three consecutive days, 26, 27, 28 June 1959 as one of the best on record. The witnesses were not independent but there were plenty of them (nearly 40) and some of their names are known. I put this forward as a challenge; is there a convincing non-ETH explanation for the sightings? Is this really unanswerable evidence of ETH? Personally I think it is solvable, but only by stretching things to the limit. There are clues in Rev. Cruttwell's report suggesting the answer. However, it still stands as surely one of the best close-encounter cases ever. I rate it far higher than the close-encounter cases you give in *Bulletin* No. 6. Perhaps you could let readers have your views on it.

Christopher Allan, Stoke on Trent

RUSSIAN UFO CRASHES

In a two-page spread in issue 28 (1998) of the magazine *Alien Encounters* appears a remarkable list of UFO crashes and retrievals in Russia. These amazing events seem to have gone unnoticed by most ufologists, but here they are faithfully chronicled by Philip Mantle. This absurd item is neither entertaining nor amusing. So why was it published? Has Mantle gone as mad as the editors of *Alien Encounters*? Can anyone explain?

CORRECTIONS

A special feature for English majors and compulsive copy-editors

No. 1 - March 1998 Page 1. Editorial, line 11: insert full stop after 'literary criticism'. Page 3: Change 'Trinidad' to 'Trindade'; 'Naval Attache' has an acute accent on the 'e', in the printed version, with the result that it might appear as 'Naval Attachi' in the on-line version.

No. 3 - May 1998 Page 3, quotation from Klass's book on abductions - the omission of a quotation mark and a parenthesis rendered it baffling to one of our more illustrious readers: it should read '... UFO-nauts will never abduct a "True UFO-Skeptic" (TUFOS), only those who secretly believe in UFOs and those who claim they are "not especially interested in UFOs." UFO-nauts can easily discriminate between a TUFOS and a EUFOS ("Ersatz UFO Skeptic").' Pages 3-4. Letter from Philip Klass: he wrote and told me I should not have published it, so consider yourself hypnotised - OK? - now when you wake from your trance you will not see this letter and you will not notice that there is anything missing - you are now awake, you remember nothing.

No. 4 - June 1998 Page 1, 'Pathetic Cheats', 4th paragraph, line 1; change 'Trans en Provence' to 'Trans-en-Provence'. Page 2, 4th paragraph, line 1; change 'were' to 'where'.

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